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REAL "FUELLESS" DAYS ON THE EAST SIDE

By ELENE FOSTER

I SHALL never forget Will Irwin's remark when he came home after several months spent at the Front and realized with amazement that there were people in the world who could still laugh.

"There isn't a smile in all Europe," he said.

I appreciated his feeling as I sat in a Broadway car after a day spent amid the misery of the East Side. I marvelled that the people in the car could still laugh and be merry when there was all that suffering just around the corner, for it can be truly said that "there isn't a smile in all the East Side." If you could see the conditions there as I saw them you would cease to wonder at the lack of smiles; your only wonder would be that the people had the courage to continue the struggle for existence.

War and the weather have combined to make conditions in this district worse (Oh, very much worse!) than they have ever been before. Do you realize that the population of that district which we know as "The East Side" is as great as that of the city of Boston? And do you realize the difference in the area covered by this section and the area of the city of Boston?

If you do, then you have an idea of the congestion on the East Side. And realizing this, you will have a slight idea of what the fuel situation must be in this district. It is a solemn fact that there are scores of tenement houses on the East Side in which there has been no gas or water or heat since the first cold weather descended upon us the last of December.

Can you begin to get an inkling of the condition of the dwellers in these tenements? Do you know that for over a month they have not taken off their clothes night or day, and that they live and sleep in rooms in which the cracks of the windows and doors are stuffed with paper or rags so that not a breath of air can enter?

Can you imagine the condition of the plumbing in these tenements, where the pipes have been frozen all this time? And don't you marvel at the fact that as yet no epidemic has resulted from all this?

Can you imagine what it must be like to live for days and days on dry bread, with now and then a slice of raw onion to make it palatable, and with not even enough fire to make a cup of tea? If you can comprehend a quarter part of the discomforts which these poor souls have been enduring you will understand what the shortage of coal means to them. The wonder of it is that there have been no riots or uprisings, for this is just about the last straw on the back of a thoroughly weakened and thoroughly disheartened camel.

We have all suffered in a greater or lesser degree from this shortage of coal, but it is the great East Side district that has suffered the most; the people who have no facilities for storing any appreciable amount of coal, and who, even if they had the storage space, would never get enough money together to buy a whole ton of coal at once.

THE PROBLEM OF THE CELLAR DEALERS

These people are dependent on the cellar dealers for their supply of coal. These cellar dealers, selling coal by the bag or basket, have until very recently controlled the entire distribution for the tenement dwellers. The prices which they asked were fixed by competition. The coal was sold by bag or basket, never by weight.

The cellar dealers were supplied by carters, who brought the coal to them from the coal yards. These carters banded together and made their own prices for cartage, and the cellar dealer could pay these prices or go without his coal. Before the Fuel Administration took hold of the matter the carter was paying $9 per ton for the coal and charging the cellar man $3 per ton for delivering it. This made the price per ton $12 for the cellar dealer and, consequently, in order to make any profit at all, he was obliged to charge what seemed to the consumer exorbitant prices for his coal.

Now, to remedy this, the Fuel Administrator steps in and ordains that coal shall be sold by the hundredweight, and that the price per hundredweight shall be 60 cents. So, you see, the cellar dealer is paying $12 for two thousand pounds of coal and selling it for exactly what he pays for it if he sells it at the regulation price. In order to make any profit at all out of the transaction he pursues one of three courses: he sells underweight, he mixes bits of slate or sand with the coal or he openly defies the law and charges more than he is allowed. In the latter case the customer may demur and argue, but in the end he usually pays the dealer's price, knowing that if he makes any trouble about it the dealer will refuse to sell him coal in the future.

The result, therefore, of fixing the price of coal at 60 cents a hundredweight was that two-thirds of the cellar dealers on the East Side closed their cellars and temporarily retired from business. In this crisis the people could pursue one of two courses: they could either go to the coal yards or they could buy of the street pedlers who sold coal, regardless of the law, at prices ranging from 70 cents to $1.25 per hundredweight.

Naturally they preferred to go to the coal yards. This accounts for the long lines of women and children that one saw all through the snow-covered streets of the East Side, who stood for hours in the cold waiting patiently until the gate should be opened for retail distribution, for the wholesale customers had to be attended to first.

Each person carried an empty burlap bag—

A Typical Coal Cellar Man in a Genial Mood

Backache and heartache, cold feet and hands and endless patience—paid for the pickings of the ashcan and refuse heap.

The Old Women Seem To Be the Appointed Coal Scavengers of the Poor. It's a Dour Task for an Old Back and Thin Blood These Bitter Days

Photographs by Paul Thompson

I say "carried," but on the coldest days these were used as a garment for extra warmth, sometimes wrapped about the feet and sometimes worn over the head as a sort of hood. Many of the patient waiters had some sort of vehicle in which to carry the coal to their homes. The baby carriage was the favorite delivery wagon, with the child's express cart a close second. Sometimes a group of neighbors combined and hired a pushcart to carry home their purchases.

STANDING IN THE COAL LINE

I stood in one of these long queues, waiting outside a coal yard, when the thermometer was close to the zero point. At the end of a half hour I was well-nigh frozen; yet the people in front of me, much more thinly clad, had been there for two or three hours.

The line was a very long one, and was "kept in order" by two burly policemen; but, bless you! there wasn't the slightest need for their services. There was nothing in the least disorderly in that long line of stolid, patient, long-suffering women and children. In point of fact there was scarcely a word spoken, barely a sound except now and again a cry from a child, whose feet ached with the cold, or a stifled groan from a woman whose body had become weary almost beyond endurance.

There were old, old women who looked far too feeble to carry home the hundred pounds of coal when they received it; young mothers, with tiny babies folded to their breasts for warmth, and with two or three other children clinging to their skirts. And there were pale, anæmic, half-grown children, with the tired, world-weary expression on their faces which comes of sharing the family burdens and worries.

All in all it wasn't exactly a cheerful party, I can tell you! And sometimes, after all these hours of waiting, a dreadful thing happens—the coal gives out before the last of the line is served. This means another night of cold and misery for these people and an early start on the morrow, so that the experience will not be repeated.

THAT HUNGRY STOVE

An old Italian woman stood just ahead of me in the line and I got into conversation with her.

"How often do you have to come for coal?" I asked.

"I come to-day and not nexta day, but nexta day I come again," she replied. "My stova eat mucha coal. She mucha hungry stova! Costa mucha mon!"

"Do you carry it yourself?" I asked, for she seemed very frail.

"Yes, miss; I liva up five flighta; I musta resta mucha, but I carry. My man he worka hard, maka mon forstova eat. Bada winter!" this with a shiver; and then she added, in the most pathetic tone, with her eyes raised to heaven. "Bada, bada war!"

By this time we had reached the coal distributer, and to her great relief the old woman's bag was filled. The ghost of a smile passed across her face as she deposited her 60 cents and raised the bag to her head to carry it in the real Italian fashion.

"Gooda-by," miss," she said. "Gooda lucka; you getta coal all righta."

I watched her as she balanced the bag and started up the street. She had gone but a few yards when a dire catastrophe befell her. The bag, worn thin with constant use, gave way and the coal came tumbling down all over the poor old soul. I rushed to her assistance and we mended the bag with two wire hairpins. (My Aunt Elizabeth says that there is nothing that can't be mended with a wire hairpin except a broken heart.) Then, while one of the big policeman kept the crowd away, we gathered up the precious bits and she went on her way rejoicing.

One has only to watch the progress of a dweller on the East Side as he walks along the street to realize that the subject uppermost and ever present in his mind is coal. He walks along with his eyes fastened on the pavements and in the gutters in search of a bit of the precious commodity. Every tiny bit is eagerly seized and dropped into pocket or bag. He even stops before the ashcans and pokes over the ashes for stray pieces. Down under the Williamsburg Bridge there is always a group of women dilligently going over the contents of the ash-barrels that stand there. Coal is to these people the veritable "black diamond" of the old song.

Hitherto money has been the panacea for all the ills of the East Side, but this is the one emergency in which money is of little or no assistance. Of what use is money if there is no coal to be bought?

The Fuel Administration has done a great deal toward alleviating the suffering, but it has not yet reached a satisfactory solution of the coal problem. It has established offices in different parts of the city to aid in the distribution of coal to the people who need it the most. The office which covers the greater part of the East Side district is in the University Settlement Building, on Rivington Street.

Here people who are in need of coal, and who can no longer purchase it of their own cellar dealer, are registered and given a card to a dealer who has a supply of coal on hand. Every day inspectors go through the district, visiting all the cellar dealers to ascertain where there is coal to be bought. Dealers having a supply on hand are asked to honor customers bringing a card from the fuel administrator's office before giving coal to any other transient customers.

Incidentally, these inspectors at the same time make sure that the dealer is asking the legal price for his coal, and that the big white price card, which the Fuel Administration has ordered to be tacked up in plain sight in every coal cellar in the city, hangs where the customers can see it. Often, very often, the dealer (quite by accident, he will assure you) has hung a burlap bag or a bushel basket over this sign, and he is greatly surprised when the inspector orders him to remove it.

Sometimes the Settlement has an opportunity to buy two or three tons of coal, and when this is the case it is sold at the office to the applicants. Families where there are very small children, invalids or very old people are given precedence, but it is often very difficult to know whether or not the applicant is telling the truth about the conditions at home.

A Russian woman came into the Fuel Administration office while I was there the other day who said she had six children.

"Where are they?" asked the inspector. "Are they all at home?"

"Three are at home," was the answer. "I took the others to Brooklyn."

"What are they doing there; are they working?"

"Oh, no," said the guileless one, "they are in the cemetery."

Sometimes there is no money in the family exchequer with which to buy coal, if any is procurable. These cases are investigated immediately, and, if found worthy, there is a fund which has been given by philanthropic friends of the Settlement to cover their needs. In offices which have no such fund on which to draw there is what is known as "Mayor Hylan's Coal Fund," which is distributed for the same purpose.

TO REINSTATE THE CELLAR DEALER

Some ten days ago the Fuel Administrator inaugurated a system which aims to reinstate the cellar dealer and do away with the peddling on the streets. In each coal yard there is an inspector who interviews each carter as he is leaving the yard with his load. Each must tell to whom he is going to deliver the coal and how much he is charging for the cartage.

This information is recorded by the inspector and the carter is given a slip which he is to have signed by the dealer to whom he delivers the coal. The dealer keeps this slip and gives it to the policeman on the beat, who turns it in at Headquarters. Here clerks compare it with the slip which the coal yard inspector has also turned in to them, and if it does not tally the next time that carter applies for coal he will find the gates closed to him. This system seems to be working out very well, so well that a great many of the cellar dealers have opened up again.

There is also another solution under consideration. This is to put the distribution of coal in the hands of the Commissioner of Markets. By this system the city is to take over the coal supply and rent the yards from the coal companies. Carters are to be paid a specified sum for delivering the coal, so much per load per mile, and they are to deliver it to the cellar dealer, who pays the city for it. Of course, in this case the dealer would be obliged to give a $50 or $100 bond to the city before he is given any coal.

IMPRESSIONISTIC COAL SELLING

The crying need at the present time, of course, outside the lack of coal, seems to be more inspectors for the cellar dealers. In nine cases out of ten the dealer will cheat his customers unless he is carefully watched and the fear of the consequences implanted in his soul. It was only yesterday that I met an Italian woman in one of the side streets, south of Washington Square, who was carrying a dishpan full of coal.

"How much did you pay for that?" I asked her.

"Forty-five cents," she replied.

I went to the cellar dealer across the street from whom she had bought the coal and asked him how many pounds he had put in the pan. He could speak no English, but his young son interpreted for him.

"My father says he didn't weigh the coal, but he thinks about thirty pounds," said the boy.

The woman had paid at the rate of $1.50 per hundred pounds for that coal!

"Where is your price card?" I asked.

The boy pulled down the burlap bag which covered it.

"My father just put the bag up there a minute ago," he said.

"You can tell your father that if he covers that sign up again or sells coal for more than the price on that card he will be sent to prison!" I said.

This bit of information was passed on to the father, who immediately fell on his knees in the coal dust and prayed to the Madonna and all the saints to save him from such a fate.

"You see," remarked the son, "my father is a good man. He wouldn't cheat nobody. He is always praying just like that."

"I don't doubt your word," said I, "but here is 25 cents; I want to buy that burlap bag!"

The Stretchless Sweater

By NANCY WOODS WALBURN

"THE SWEATER is bully, Sis," wrote a grateful brother in a Southern training camp, "but can't you make one that doesn't stretch? They get all out of shape in a jiffy." And straightway here is her solution!

This is the origin of the stretchless sweater shown on this page. Its story is interesting. In a New York tea room recently a young woman was making one. Taking advantage of the freemasonry that exists among war knitters, I promptly examined it. When I asked why she had thus knitted it in this pattern, instead of the regulation manner, she explained that her brother, who was in a Southern training camp, had complained that his sweater stretched and got baggy and out of shape so quickly. It was to overcome this difficulty that she had introduced frequent strips of purling, which counteract, by fitting more closely, the tendency to stretch.

The other ideas for knitted, crocheted or eiderdown garments already published in The Tribune have been those which economize in wool or labor. Frankly, this so-called stretchless sweater does neither.

On the contrary, a sweater made according to this pattern takes slightly more wool, as well as additional time. But, on the other hand, it yields far more warmth and is more durable, so that those who have seen it think it more than justifies this slightly increased expenditure. These are the directions:

Three and one-half hanks yarn.

Cast on 80 stitches, knit 2, purl 2 stitches for five inches. Purl 3, knit 5, purl 2, knit 5, purl 2, knit 5, until the last 8 stitches are reached, then knit 5, purl 3, purl all the way back. Purl 3, knit 5, purl 2, knit 5, purl 2, knit 5, until last 8 stitches are reached, then knit 5, purl 3. Purl all the way back. Repeat this until sweater measures 25 inches. Knit and purl 28 stitches, bind off 24 stitches for neck, loose. Knit and purl 28 stitches. Knit and purl 3 inches on each shoulder, cast on 24 stitches, knit and purl for 21 inches, the same as beginning. Knit 2, purl 2 for 5 inches. Sew up sides, leaving 9 inches for armholes. Two rows single crochet around neck and 1 row single crochet around armholes.

Just Knittin'

By NANCY FITZHUGH RICHEY

"THAT'S what I call carrying knitting too far," my caller announced with decision.

"What is?" I asked, laboriously holding one needle under my arm as I let go the other one to loop the yarn around. I blushed to think I had not been paying as strict attention to what she had been saying as I should have. But I was absorbed in the intricacies of my unaccustomed task.

"Oh, not you," she replied, dryly, glancing at my four crooked rows. "It will be some time before yours has gone too far!"

Then she repeated with irritation the story whose point I had missed. She had been shopping all the afternoon, and as she walked down the crowded aisle of a big department store her sides had been dug into deeply by the jogging elbows of an enthusiastic knitter—and not only her sides, but the sides of everybody that passed the one who was so assiduously "doing her bit."

"Why, even the floorwalker got tangled up in the yarn when she dropped her ball!" my friend told me indignantly, between sips of tea. "And her bag swung against the veils and handkerchiefs on the counters until I thought she would be accused of shoplifting!"

"But don't you think," I asked her, "that it is better for women to carry war work too far than not to show any interest? Some of them don't, you know."

"Ye-es," she said, "I do, when it comes down to that. But why can't all women use system in their work? The ones I speak of are those who fall headlong into a new idea, causing everybody else to neglect his duties in order to scramble out of the danger path. Do they really accomplish anything then?"

I couldn't help laughing. I was thinking of another friend of mine who was an assiduous war worker, only hers took the form of diet instead of knitting. Her own sister confessed that when she saw Margaret coming she hastily dispatched some member of the family on the mission of sitting on the garbage can, lest Margaret discover that the potato peelings were too thick or that the beet tops had been thrown away!